

RGN Gazetteer

Russia “How to” Guide, Beginner Level: Instruction

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GOAL

This guide will teach you how to use the *Russisches Geographisches Namenbuch* (RGN) gazetteer to identify locations in the former Russian Empire.

INTRODUCTION

The RGN was compiled by Max Vasmer and is the best comprehensive gazetteer of all localities in Imperial Russia. The *Spiski naseleennykh Mest Rossiiski Imperii* or *Spiski* gazetteer was the primary source for much of the data. This set includes eleven volumes as well as a volume containing maps. The gazetteer is organized alphabetically.

The localities are listed in the Cyrillic alphabet; the exception is Congress Poland, which are written in Roman letters. Location descriptions are in German. The pre-1917 administrative units of *gubernia* or province (G.) and *uезд* or county (Kr.) are given. If there are several localities of the same name in the same *gubernia*, only the first locality in the group has the name of the *gubernia* listed. Important bibliographical references and lists of sources and abbreviations are found in volume 1 near the beginning of the book.

The RGN gazetteer only lists jurisdictions and assigns each locality a number. With this number, you can then use the *Spiski* gazetteer, which are organized by locality rather than alphabetically, to find much more detailed information on your location. To learn how to access the *Spiski* gazetteer, [click here](#).

You will need to complete this guide at the Family History Library or at another location where you can access the *Russisches Geographisches Namenbuch*. In the Family History Library, they are located in the international reference area.

You may want to consult the following “How to” Guides before continuing:

- [The Russian Alphabet](#)

HOW TO

Place Name List

Volume 1, pages XXV-XXXVII contains a list of all *gubernia* and *uезд* jurisdictions found in the RGN. It is organized by *gubernia*, and lists all *uезд* jurisdictions in each *gubernia*. They are

recorded in German (left column) and Russian (right column).

Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Russian word	German word	English word
г., Г.	губерния	Gouvernement	gubernia / province
обл.	область	Gouvernement	oblast / province
окр., Кр., р.	округ	Kreis	okrug / county
у.	уезд	Kreis	uyezd / county

A more comprehensive list of abbreviations and source material is found in Volume 1, pages XXXVIII-XLII. These include atlases, maps, and gazetteers, most important of which are the references to *Spiski* gazetteer.

Steps

1. Transliterate the place name into the Cyrillic alphabet. To transliterate the place name into Cyrillic, [click here](#).
2. Choose the appropriate volume based on the initial Cyrillic letter of the place name. Search for the location alphabetically.
3. Decide which entry is the best fit for the spelling that you have. If there are multiple entries, you may have to use geographic clues to determine which locality is correct.
4. Depending on your knowledge of the German language, you may have to use a dictionary or a translation website such as <https://translate.google.com> to read the entry.
5. Use the abbreviation list in the front of Volume 1 to determine more information regarding the locality.

Further information

For more information about Russian Empire jurisdictions, read the article on the FamilySearch Wiki, found at: https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Russia_Genealogy.

PRACTICE

Let's search for the place Biryakovo. First, transliterate the place name into Cyrillic letters: В = Б; і = и; r = р; ya = я; k = к; o = о; v = в; o = о. The entry could be spelled Биряково. The B's or Б's are located in volume one. You will find the entry on page 393.

Биряково Dorf, Bez. 1, Kr. Totma, G. Vologda (Vol. Nr. 8788)

Using the list of sources and abbreviations, we can look up what the entry is telling us.

Dorf	village	This is not found in the abbreviations, but can be found in a German dictionary
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Bez.	Bezirk	A word used for district. Biryakovo is in district #1
Kr.	Kreis	In Russian уезд – <i>uyezd</i> or county. Biryakovo is in the <i>uyedz</i> of Totma.
G.	Gouvernement	In Russian, this is губерния – <i>gubernia</i> or province. Biryakovo is located in the <i>gubernia</i> of Vologda.
Vol. Nr. 8788	<i>Spiski naseleennykh mest Ross. Imp., Bd. 7. Vologodskaja Gubernia.</i>	This is the reference to the <i>Spiski</i> gazetteer. Look up this village in the gazetteer in the 1866 version for Vologda, entry number 8788. This gazetteer will provide a more detailed description of the village, including parish information.

This gazetteer tells you that Biryakova is a village in district 1 of the *uyezd* of Totma, in the *gubernia* of Vologda. More information regarding the village can be found in the *Spiski* gazetteer for Vologda.

ACTIVITY

Now, test your skills you have learned in this “How to” Guide. The Activity is a way to check your knowledge and let you know you’ve mastered the Guide! [Click here](#) to try out the Activity.